

Equitable Life Assurance Company Building
(Bankers Trust Building)
605 Locust Street (NW corner of 6th Avenue
and Locust Street)
Des Moines
Polk County
Iowa

HABS No. IA-68

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. 1A-68

EQUITABLE LIFE ASSURANCE COMPANY BUILDING
(BANKERS TRUST BUILDING)

Location: 605 Locust Street (northwest corner of Sixth Avenue and Locust Street) Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa.

Present Occupant and Use: Demolished 1980.

Present Owner: Ruan Corporation (1980).

Significance: The Equitable Life Assurance Company Building, designed in 1891 by a prominent Boston firm, exemplifies late nineteenth century design and construction technology developed for large commercial and office buildings. The elegant structure was associated with important individuals in the business history of Des Moines, and with the late-nineteenth century development of the state's urban center.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1891.
2. Architect: Andrews, Jacques and Rantoul of Boston. Robert Day Andrews worked in the office of H. H. Richardson in Boston prior to establishing his own firm with Herbert Jacques and Augustus Neal Rantoul in 1885. The firm's work included the east and west wings added to the Boston State House between 1895 and 1913, Brookline High School and other school buildings in the Boston area, and the Equitable Life Assurance Company Building in Denver, Colorado.
3. Original plans and construction: As originally constructed the building was eight stories tall. Original plans called for a garden or terrace off the grand staircase hall and a large library, neither of which were built.
4. Alterations and additions: The top four floors were added in 1911 by Proudfoot, Bird, and Rawson, architects. In 1959, a two-story addition covering the west half of the lot was

built to provide additional lobby and office space. Extensive interior remodeling occurred over the years, particularly on the first floor. The original grand staircase hall was converted for use as an elevator lobby. Some of the offices on upper floors were remodelled.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Several prominent Iowa bankers and businessmen are associated with the building. Foremost is Frederick M. Hubbell, who owned the building from 1907 to 1919.

C. Bibliography:

American Architecture and Building News, January 23, 1892, No. 839
American Architecture and Building News, March 28, 1891, pp. 195-207
History of Polk County, Iowa, Vol. i. 1911. pp. 322-323
Shank, Wesley I. The Iowa Catalog, Historic American Buildings Survey
(Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1979) pp. 65, 97

Prepared by Emily J. Harris
Historic American Buildings
Survey
July 1980

from National Register of Historic
Places Inventory - Nomination
Form prepared by Judy McClure &
Jack Porter
October 1, 1975

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement: The building was a handsome example of a late nineteenth century tall commercial building with Richardsonian Romanesque details including arcaded openings and a granite base.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building was rectangular, 132 feet (nine-bay front), by 66 feet (five bays), with a 15 foot by 60 foot light well on the west side. It was twelve stories with a mezzanine.
2. Wall construction finish, color: First two floors were faced with gray granite, remaining ten floors were red brick with terra cotta trim. The building was divided into sections through varying facade treatments, each

terminating in different versions of arcaded openings. Original structure terminates at eighth floor intermediate cornice line which is above arcade of engaged three-story columns.

3. Structural system, framing: The first eight floors are framed in cast iron with terra cotta fire-proofing. The upper four floors, added in 1911, are steel frame.
4. Balconies: Small stone balcony on Locust Street (east, front) elevation above original main entrance between second and third floors.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Main entrance was originally on Locust Street (east) elevation in the center bay of the arcade. It was moved one bay to the north, probably with the 1959 remodelling. There was originally a secondary entrance on this elevation in the second bay from the north, which was moved one bay to the south to be adjacent to the new main entrance.
 - b. Windows: Double-hung sash windows with varying arcaded surrounds used to create four vertical sections.
6. Roof: Flat with projecting cornice of acanthus brackets, moldings, and lions heads.

C. Description of Interior:

The original entrances to the building led to the staircase hall which had an elaborate divided stair, vaulted ceilings and a series of arches leading to rooms on the sides. The first floor and basement were arranged to accomodate banking services, while the remaining floors were divided into offices. Every office suite of two or three rooms had an open fireplace. Stairs between floors were open with decorative cast iron railings. An addition to the building opened the original lobby and mezzanine to increase the lobby area in 1959.

- D. Site: Occupied northwest corner of Sixth Avenue and Locust Street, filling roughly one quarter of a city block. Surrounded by tall commercial and office buildings, most of which were constructed during the twentieth century.

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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation for the Equitable Life Assurance Building was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) by the Division of Historic Preservation, Iowa State Historical Department in February 1980, prior to the demolition of the building. Photographs were taken by Robert A. Ryan and Hans Muessig of Dennett, Muessig and Associates in December 1979, and one photo was taken by Robert Thall in September 1977 in conjunction with the preparation of the HABS Iowa catalogue. Written data was prepared by Emily J. Harris, an architectural historian in the HABS office in July 1980, from a National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination form and the HABS Iowa catalogue. The structure was listed on the National Register on April 22, 1976, but was subsequently removed from listing due to a procedural error.